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*Centenary
of the
Sisters of St. Joseph
in the
Diocese of Erie
1860-1960*





Dedication

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania through the Most Holy Trinity gratefully dedicate these pages to the memory of the valiant pioneer Sisters who one hundred years ago prayed and labored that the Congregation might take root and bear a rich harvest for the greater glory of God.

Centennial Commemoration

*Centenary
of the
Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern Pennsylvania
in the
Diocese of Erie
1860-1960*



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*3339 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington 8, D. C.*

Nº 9029/60

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

May 1, 1960

Reverend and dear Sister M. Aurelia:

As the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania prepare to celebrate the joyous occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of their entrance into the Diocese of Erie from the Carondelet Foundation in St. Louis, Missouri, I am pleased to inform you that the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, has graciously deigned to impart his Apostolic Benediction.

It is the wish of His Holiness that this Blessing be shared by the members of the Community, and by the clergy, religious and laity who join with you in observing this historic anniversary.

In spirit, the Sovereign Pontiff would join his prayers with yours in thanking Almighty God for His loving care and benevolence towards the Sisters of St. Joseph through the past century. May God continue in the years to come to bless and prosper your zealous and self-sacrificing efforts in the field of education, and in the care of the sick, the orphaned and the aged.

With warm personal congratulations and good wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *J. Tagliaferri*
Apostolic Delegate

Reverend Sister M. Aurelia
Superior
Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph
Villa Maria
Erie, Pennsylvania



His Holiness Pope John XXIII

Archbishop's Residence

205 WEST NINTH STREET

Erie, Pennsylvania



The Golden Jubilee

Let us go back to the time the first Sister of St. Joseph appeared on earth. It was in the City of Le Puy-en-Velay, in France, in the year 1650. It was a Jesuit priest by the name of Medaille who conceived the idea of a community of women devoted to works of charity and education for the benefit of mankind. Their first labors were the care of orphan children. As they grew in numbers they assumed the work of nursing the sick in hospitals and then entered the broad field of Christian education. Academies for young girls, care of the deaf and the blind, protection for the destitute, care of the aged and geriatric, and love for the neglected children who run foul of the law but may be restored to honorable citizenship.

The historical appearance of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in the Diocese of Erie was in 1860 in Corsica. It was temporary. In 1864 they moved to Meadville and established what is now known as the modern and highly reputed Spencer Hospital. They branched to Erie to establish Saint Joseph's Orphan Home, and from then on the history of the community has been a phenomenal growth in the field of charity and Christian education, well known to the public of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Now they have reached the day called the Golden Jubilee, one hundred years of loving service to our Dear Lord and Master. What a beautiful picture they form! It looks like a vision from Our Lord and His Heaven. Who has the pen to portray their love for Our Lord and their joy in labor and sacrifice in His behalf?

They seem to form the golden threads that run through the tapestry of the history of the Diocese of Erie. Whenever the Bishop called them to labor, they took the burden from his shoulders and with smiles, patiently brought success to his dreams. I can see a procession of little boys and girls, miles long, orphans, whose mothers and fathers were taken from them while they were beautiful little children, alone on earth and facing a cold and cruel world without love. I can see a Sister of Saint Joseph drawing near and folding the child in her arms with love and protection until the child was able to sustain his own life on earth. The vision comes to me of a million hospital beds in which recline the sick and dying—often with tears and painful suffering—but always a Sister of Saint Joseph calming their anxieties and whispering the consoling rewards our Dear Lord promised those who believed and trusted Him.

There is nothing so pitiful as the loneliness of the aged, fathers and mothers whose children have neglected them or who have to wait on earth for years before the Lord summons them. But you often find a Sister of Saint Joseph near to become the kind daughter of the lonely father or mother to sweeten the days that remain. The geriatric, who always suffers in body and spirit, receives from her hands a kindness and love that not only softens the hardship but fills the soul with the love of God while it passes into another world so wonderful that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

My pen fails me when I try to picture the Sister of Saint Joseph in the golden field of Christian education. All over the world the so-called systems of education have barred the presence of Jesus Christ, His Bible, and lessons in the field of spiritual education. All over the Diocese the Sisters of Saint Joseph have called together little children to form a Christian school or to set up a catechetical center near a public school to teach them the Ten Commandments, the immortality of their souls, of Heaven and its rewards, and of the love of Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. Who can measure the volume of heavenly light their labors have flooded into the souls of an army of a million little boys and girls during the past one hundred years. Only the angels who keep the books for Our Lord can tell us the record and reveal the joy of the Supreme Being to learn He is not totally forgotten on earth.

To sum up, the deeds of these faithful and brilliant Sisters of Saint Joseph sparkle and glow like the stars in the firmament on a beautiful clear night sky. I form the jolly old moon that looks on with pleasure and a heart that is chocked with gratitude and admiration. I always feel proud when girls join their ranks.

Now that St. Mark's Seminary is completed and occupied, I dream of the vision of the magnificent new Villa Maria College soon to be built on the beautiful piece of real estate already prepared for its erection. The plans of the architect are complete and ready for bids. May it please the friends and admirers of the Sisters of Saint Joseph to come to their support and help erect this great monument to their hundred years of divine service in the Diocese of Erie.

John Mark Gannon

March 3, 1960

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*The Most Reverend Edward P. McManaman,
S.T.D., LL.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of Erie*

The Sisters' Centennial Message



THE privilege of serving God through dedicated lives in the Diocese of Erie elicits an expression of deep thankfulness and profound gratitude from our Sisters at this memorial time, our centennial commemoration.

We are most grateful to our heavenly Father for a watchful providence that has watered the seed, fed the roots, and given the increase to our Community with the advance of the years. This is dew let down from heaven.

We are sincerely grateful to our Christlike bishops and fervent priests whose counsel, protection, confidence, and encouragement made possible the fulfillment of the end of our Institute in new works of zeal with the approach of each decade.

We particularly give thanks to our Lord for that span of years that has fallen within the Golden Age of the Erie Diocese, an age in which Northwestern Pennsylvania has moved forward dynamically in spiritual, educational, and cultural growth and progress through the vision and leadership of an ecclesiastical luminary, our beloved Superior and Archbishop.

We recall with deepest gratitude and tender affection our devoted parents whose exemplary lives built on faith, prayers, and sacrifice gave birth to our religious vocations.

We offer grateful acknowledgments to all our ardent friends, thoughtful benefactors, generous professional and legal counselors, competent trustees, incorporators, and auxiliaries, staunch alumnae, lay teachers and personnel, loyal parent associations, cooperative press, radio and television representatives, responsible city and county officials.

We thank almighty God for each and every soul we have been privileged to draw closer to Him in the schools, hospitals, homes for children and the aged, in social service agencies and catechetical centers, and we pray that He may go before us with His gracious inspirations and continued assistance as we look toward a new century of dedicated service.

Mather M. Aurelia



*Our Lady's Chapel, Villa Maria
Erie, 1927*

Mother Agnes Spencer



Erie Foundress and First General Superior

*St. Joseph's Convent and Orphanage
Meadville, 1866*



BENEATH the grandeur of a religious community come to the maturity of its centenary, there is an obscure but priceless history. It is the history of humble beginnings, of struggle; but more, it is the history of those who by their spiritual motherhood have given birth to present greatness by past labor and sacrifice. Each mother superior has been an instrument of Providence, entrusted with the mission of planting the roots of an infant community or of nurturing, strengthening those roots to enable them to bear a harvest of progress and accomplishment.

On August 15, 1823, in an England yet hostile to things Catholic, Mary Spencer, destined to furrow the ground for the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Erie diocese, was born to John and Elizabeth Spencer of Brindle, Lancashire. At the impressionable age of twelve, Mary knew a choppy journey across the Atlantic, settling with her family, first at Utica, New York, and then finally, along the basin of the Mississippi in St. Louis, Missouri. It seems providential that Mary learned early the adjustments that migration necessitates, adjustments that would help her in later years to span the area from the Mississippi to Eastern cities as often as it was God's will, and to call each new destination "home."

Providential, too, was the fact that the Sisters of St. Joseph had already established an academy for girls six miles south of St. Louis in a little village called Carondelet. Mary and her sister Martha became boarders at that school until God called each to change her status from student to postulant, to become candidates of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The anniversary of one date, November 15, 1848, called for dual celebration all their lives; for on that day, Sister Mary Agnes (Mary) made final profession and her sister Martha received the habit with her name in religion, Sister Augustine.

The Carondelet archives refer to Sister Agnes Spencer as "a woman of strong personality, great tact, and ability." That ability was early tested with the responsibilities of



St Vincent Hospital, Erie, 1875

a superior, when, at the age of twenty-nine, Sister Agnes was placed in charge of St. John's Orphanage for boys in Philadelphia. Two years later she became the first superior of the Sisters' Hospital in Wheeling, West Virginia.

On December 8, 1854, the day the Holy Father defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Mother Agnes opened a mission in Canandaigua, New York, and called their home the Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Because Canandaigua was then within the confines of the Buffalo diocese, but later became a part of the newly-formed Rochester diocese, the small Immaculate Conception Convent became the nucleus for foundations of the Sisters of St. Joseph in both dioceses.

At Bishop Timon's request, Mother Agnes went to the See City of Buffalo in 1856 to prepare for the opening of a school for deaf mutes. In October, 1857, Bishop Timon had

his wish fulfilled—St. Mary's Institute for the Deaf was opened. At that time the board of directors elected Mother Agnes a trustee.

The care of the deaf assured, once more the Bishop solicited Mother Agnes' assistance, this time at Dunkirk, New York, where she took charge of St. Mary's Orphan Asylum and School, an institution of which she was also elected a trustee.

Then, in 1860, Mother Agnes accepted Bishop Joshua Young's invitation to establish the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Erie diocese. There was nothing romantic about that move. The sisters came to staff St. Ann's Academy, Corsica, a school organized

through the industry of Reverend Thomas Ledwith. Idealist that he was, Father Ledwith did not foresee the hardships the winters at Corsica would bring to the new group of sisters, nor that the rigors of the first year would claim the life of the youngest religious, twenty-three-year-old Sister Victoria Lequier, now buried in the parish cemetery there.

Bitter anti-Catholic feeling then sweeping the country also must have had its effects on the little band of sisters. Most significant, they came to a region that was already suffering the severing ties of a Civil War. Such were the trials the founding sisters in the Erie diocese faced.

The Reverend Jean-Pierre Medaille, S.J., founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph over 200 years before, had prepared his "little design" for such trials. "Be courageous in undertaking what God desires . . . never relinquishing it whatever difficulties may arise" had been one of the maxims he had given the sisters when, under the sponsorship of the Most Reverend Henry de Maupas, Bishop of Le Puy, France, they were established in 1650.

St. Joseph's Orphanage and Motherhouse, Erie, 1868



An active order established "to unite the duties of Martha and of Mary" had been an innovation in that era when most of the religious congregations for women were contemplative. Bishop de Maupas and Father Medaille, as Francis de Sales before them, saw a need for religious women who could work among the people, establishing orphanages for children and schools for the unlearned.

During the French Revolution that work for the Sisters of St. Joseph ceased. They were forced to abandon their convents, even their religious garb, and flee to their homes for refuge. Providence spared Mother St. John Fontbonne that she might restore the "little design" under Cardinal Fesch's jurisdiction in Lyons, France, 1809.

A quarter of a century later, Mother St. John sent six of her sisters to the American mission territory. With Bishop Rosati of St. Louis as their spiritual father, the sisters settled in 1836 at Carondelet, where a log cabin was to be their first motherhouse.

Such was the heritage of the sisters who came to the Erie diocese in 1860 with the superior who was no ordinary sower. The same aura of silence that centuries ago enveloped her patron, St. Joseph, also, surrounds definitive knowledge of this first superior of the Erie Sisters of St. Joseph.

History has proved, however, that Mother Agnes Spencer came to Erie as an experienced administrator and that, in "saving her best wine until last," Erie became her Cana. That same history bears witness to her fidelity to a rule that dictated that education of children be one of the first works of the congregation.

Wherever her sisters went in the Diocese, they opened Select Schools—somewhat comparable to the private academies of today—or assumed teaching responsibility in parochial schools. Teaching took the sisters to Corsica (1860) and to Frenchtown (1862). Two years later Mother Agnes closed these academies and established her sisters in Meadville where they started another Select School. This was but the beginning; each year the sisters assumed new parochial teaching positions. At Mother Agnes' death in 1882, the Sisters of St. Joseph were instructing 2,350 children in the Diocese of Erie.

In 1871, Mother Agnes accepted St. Mary's School in Painesville, Ohio, but withdrew her sisters at the close of the year when Bishop Mullen requested their work be confined to



Spencer Hospital, Meadville, 1957

the Erie diocese. Mother George Bradley and her two companions, who had come from St. Paul, Minnesota, to assist Mother Agnes, took over the Painesville mission and thus made the first foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Cleveland.

Besides education, Mother Agnes' Rule advised that the sisters "devote themselves to all duties of charity and works of mercy." Such service Mother Agnes seemed to find as natural as breathing, often providing cots in the halls of her convents and orphanages to care for the sick.

Using her own patrimony, Mother Agnes Spencer purchased the original Pine Street site of Spencer Hospital, Meadville. She bought the property April 11, 1865, with the intention of building an orphanage and convent, and perhaps having a nook big enough to tend to the sick. Four months later her plans were temporarily interrupted as she went to Erie to open the first house of the congregation in Bishop Young's Episcopal City—St. Vincent Hospital on Fourth Street.

Mother Agnes remained in Erie until October when Mother Martha Bunning, from the Toronto foundation, came to aid the Erie sisters, leaving Mother Agnes free to return to her Meadville building program.

Within five months, the Fourth Street house proved too small and the Erie foundation moved to a larger home on Second Street, making a change also in name—from St. Vincent's to St. Joseph's. At first St. Joseph's

served as a combined hospital and orphanage, but later, at the Bishop's suggestion, the sisters relinquished its use as a hospital.

In Meadville, the new St. Joseph Orphanage and Convent was formally opened August 15, 1866, a month before the sudden death of Bishop Young. Even from the first, Mother Agnes received into this home patients that needed medical attention. Epidemics during the ensuing fall and spring made such charity almost a necessity.

In 1868, shortly after Bishop Mullen's consecration — perhaps at his suggestion — Mother Agnes consolidated her two orphan asylums into one, moving all the Meadville



A Century of Service

orphans to the Erie institution. Mother Agnes herself accompanied them and established the motherhouse of the congregation in Erie. From that time on, St. Joseph Convent at Meadville was used as a hospital.

At this time Bishop Mullen cited the need for a larger orphanage. In the letter which the Bishop requested her to publish, Mother Agnes alluded to the debt of a new orphanage: "When or where this immense sum can be raised, we cannot tell; but our trust is in God Who has never forsaken us." God did not disappoint Mother Agnes. October 31, 1872, found the new St. Joseph Orphan Asylum on Third Street (until recently—St. Mark's Seminary) opening its doors to the public. Press notices described the new orphanage "as permanent as it is possible to make a building."

It was in that building that Bishop Mullen assembled a committee on April 12, 1874, to discuss ways and means of establishing a hospital in the city of Erie. Less than a month later, he made his plan public and commissioned the Sisters of St. Joseph to canvass the city for money for the new project. Hard as this might have been for the sisters, they were undoubtedly encouraged through the enthusiasm and example of Mother Agnes who herself went soliciting for the sick. On September 5, 1875, St. Vincent Hospital on Sassafras Street was formally opened. It was a festive day for Mother Agnes and her sisters.

At the community election, August 17, 1877, Sister Ambrosia Power was elected superior and the Reverend Mother Agnes Spencer relieved of her office. A month later found Mother Agnes again in the role of the mendicant, canvassing the oil districts of the diocese for contributions for the orphans. Then came her last assignment, superintendent of the hospital she loved so well—St. Vincent in Erie.

It was the Hour of Compline in Mother Agnes' life. March 18, 1881, the report was that Mother Agnes was "continuing her duties . . . although her health was noticeably failing." A year later, March 22, 1882, during the octave of the Feast of St. Joseph, the fifty-nine-year-old "sower" who had sought "no praise or recompense for her good work in this life" . . . went to receive her "greater and more enduring reward in eternity."



Mother Ambrosia Power



Second General Superior



OTHER Agnes Spencer's successor in office was one of the first laborers to enter the vineyard of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Erie diocese.

On April 17, 1865, in St. Agatha Church, Meadville, this solitary young lady, too radiantly happy to be conscious of her aloneness, assured the Rev. William Engel that she had freely chosen God for her portion. Forthwith, Catherine Power, just eighteen years of age, was clothed in the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph, receiving the name of Sister Mary Ambrosia. The name was prophetic.

Catherine Power, daughter of David and Margaret Power, was born in Limerick, Ireland, February 20, 1847. Two years later her parents emigrated to America, settling eventually in Linesville, Pennsylvania.

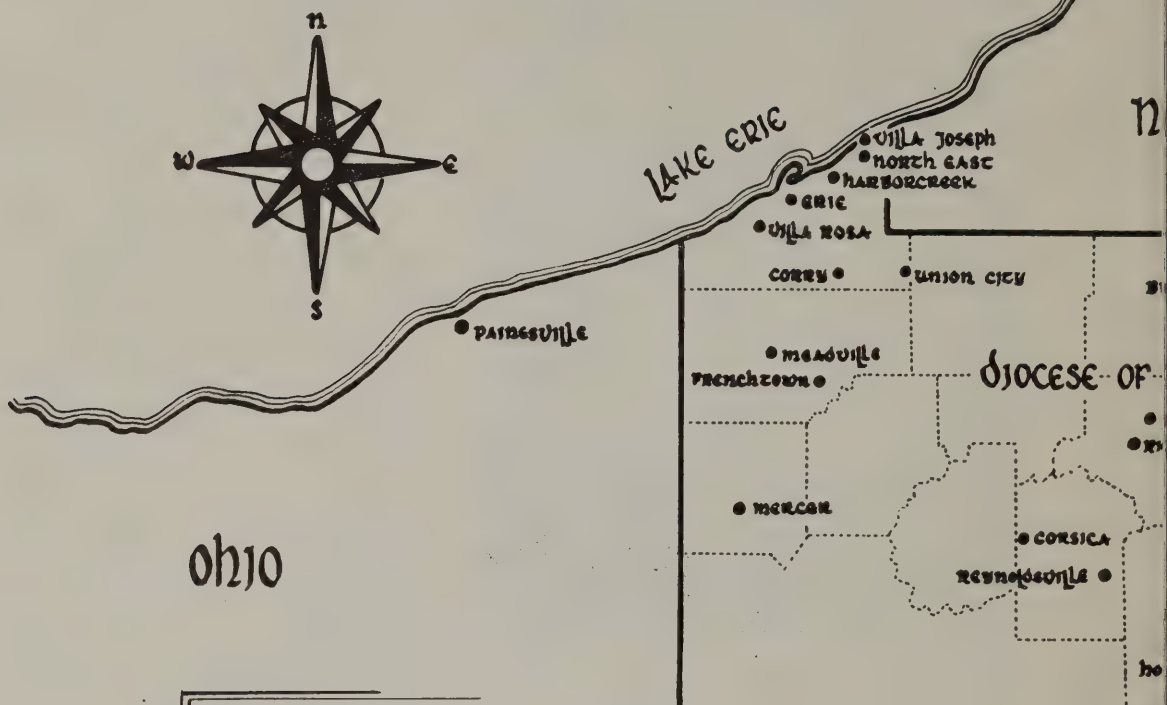
Although their daughter's education was begun in the public school of that little town, it was to the Sisters of St. Joseph in Meadville that they entrusted the final molding of Catherine's mind and character. Now, she had elected to identify herself with her religious teachers in a selfless venture for the glory of God—to light one more candle in the current darkness.

After the customary two-year novitiate, passed in St. Joseph Convent, Erie, Sister Ambrosia, with three companions, made her profession August 28, 1868, the first ceremony of its kind to be performed by the newly consecrated Bishop Mullen.

The education of youth was Sister Ambrosia's first assignment in the apostolate of the community. From 1867 to 1871, she served as directress of St. Patrick Academy for Girls. Then, after supervising the Painesville school for one year, she opened St. Thomas School in Corry where she and her assistants, Sister Cecilia Dufton and Sister Angela Darby, did much in that area to dispel prejudice against religious teachers.

When St. Vincent Hospital was formally opened in 1875, Sister Ambrosia was selected

SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH OF NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA



Legend

CORSICA ST. ANN ACADEMY AND MOTHERHOUSE 1860-1864

FRENCHTOWN ST. HIPPOLYTE ACADEMY 1862-1864

MEADVILLE ST. JOSEPH CONVENT AND MOTHERHOUSE 1864-1868

ST. JOSEPH ORPHANAGE 1866-1868

ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL (SPENCER) 1868

ST. AGATHA SCHOOL 1865

ST. BRIGID SCHOOL 1870

PAINESVILLE, OHIO ST. MARY SCHOOL 1871-1872

ERIE 1 ST. VINCENT HOSPITAL (FOURTH STREET) 1865-1866

ST. JOSEPH ORPHANAGE (SECOND STREET) 1866-1872

2 ST. JOSEPH MOTHERHOUSE AND NOVIATE 1868-1872

ST. JOSEPH ACADEMY 1866-1868

3 ST. PATRICK SCHOOL 1866

4 ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL 1871

ST. JOSEPH ORPHAN ASYLUM (THIRD STREET) 1872-1924

5 ST. JOSEPH MOTHERHOUSE AND NOVIATE 1872-1897

ST. MARK HALL 1924-1939

6 ST. VINCENT HOSPITAL 1875

7 ST. JOHN SCHOOL 1883

8 ST. MARY HOME FOR

9 ST. MICHAEL SCHOOL

10 VILLA MARIA ACADE

11 ST. ANN SCHOOL 18

12 SACRED HEART CON

13 VILLA MARIA MOTHER

14 ST. PETER SCHOOL 1

15 HARBORCREEK TRAI

16 VILLA JOSEPH 1916

17 ERIE DAY NURSERY

18 ST. JOSEPH HOME FOR

19 CATHEDRAL PREPARA

20 HOLY ROSARY SCHOO

21 VILLA MARIA COLLEG

22 ST. ANDREW SCHOOL

23 BLESSED SACRAMEN

24 MARYDALE CONVENT

25 VILLA ROSA 1945

26 ST. PAUL SCHOOL

W YORK

Brook

RIE

Johnsonburg
May

Clearfield
Idaho

Pennsylvania

The aged 1884

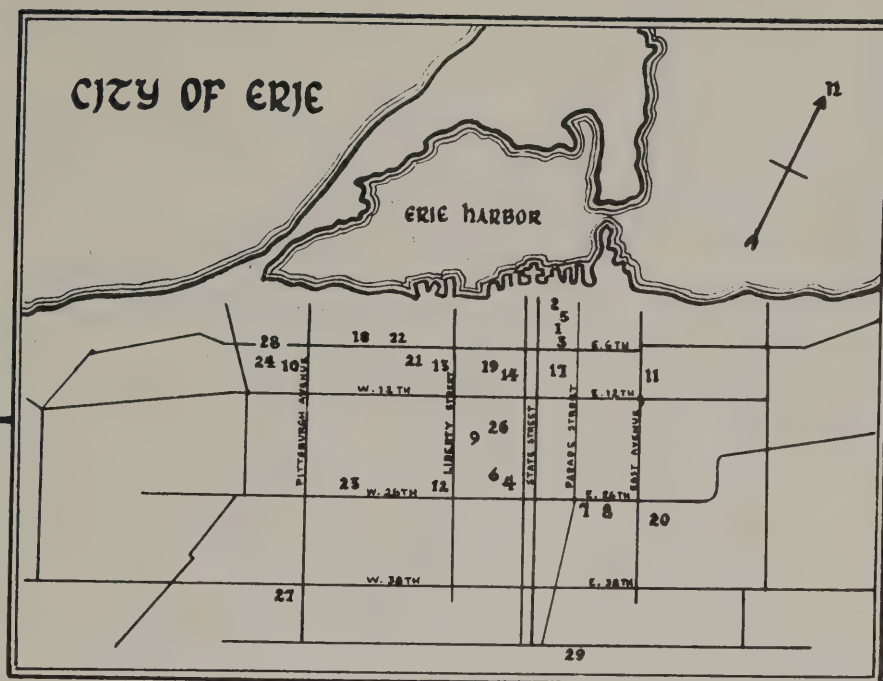
1885-1898 convent 1888
1892

nt and school 1897
use and novitiate 1897

6 school 1911

23
Johnson 1924
ry school 1924
1924 convent 1945
1925

29
school 1939
39 pre-school 1942



27 OUR LADY OF PEACE school 1957
28 OUR LADY'S CHRISTIAN school 1959
29 ST. MARK SEMINARY 1959

CORRY ST. THOMAS school 1872-1902
ST. ELIZABETH school 1881-1901
UNION CITY ST. TERESEA school 1874-1903

BRADFORD ST. BERNARD school 1879
HOUTZDALE ST. LAWRENCE school 1886-1917
CATECHETICAL CENTER 1953

CLEARFIELD ST. FRANCIS school 1893
RIDGWAY ST. LEO school 1893
REYNOLDSVILLE ST. MARY school 1901
JOHNSONBURG HOLY ROSARY school 1923
NORTH EAST ST. GREGORY school 1941-1946
MERCER CATECHETICAL CENTER 1956
COLUMBUS, OHIO VILLA MADONNA 1956





*St. Vincent Hospital
Erie, 1900*



for the exacting task of assisting Mother Agnes in its administration. Exceptional maturity of character and a commanding personality had already marked this young religious, not yet thirty years of age, as one destined for phenomenal achievements in the service of her community.

It was with pleased assurance that His Excellency witnessed in August, 1877, the election of Mother Ambrosia Power as the second general superior of her congregation. The choice expressed by the small assembly was proof of its confidence that their new superior was a worthy successor to the saintly genius of Mother Agnes Spencer who had with such unerring instinct pointed the way in every phase of community development.

To the work of supervising and reorganizing St. Joseph Orphanage, then the mother-house of the community, Mother Ambrosia brought the same indomitable spirit and quiet persistence that had characterized her suc-



*St. Vincent Hospital, Erie
Today and Tomorrow*

cess in education. Moreover, she, too, did not consider it an indignity to become a beggar for God's poor.

During her term of office, Mother Ambrosia opened two schools: St. Bernard, in Bradford, Pennsylvania; and St. Elizabeth, in Corry, Pennsylvania.

The apostolate of caring for the aged had been very dear to the heart of Mother Agnes. Thus, from the beginning, it was marked as a major community project. On March 29, 1883, Mother Ambrosia purchased from John Gensheimer five acres of land in southeastern Erie, on which to erect a home for old people. A dream was one step nearer to fulfillment.

As a result of the election held in August, 1883, Mother Clotilda Weinheimer became

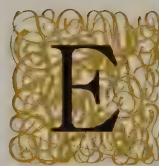
general superior of the community; and Mother Ambrosia, assistant superior.

In 1886, by the direct appointment of Bishop Mullen, Mother Ambrosia was made supervisor of St. Vincent Hospital. Thirty years later, on the occasion of her golden jubilee, and but one brief year before her death, we find her there, a personage respected and beloved by an entire city — a gifted executive whose sterling character was sweetened by boundless charity, whose optimism was undisturbed by tremendous problems, whose modesty was unaffected by success. Like her illustrious namesake, Ambrose, she was a paradox of austerity and charm. The years of her superiorship, a relatively brief and uneventful span, were the prelude to a more vital and demanding career — one in which, by her personal and spiritual endowments, she greatly ennobled the stature of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the city and in Diocese of Erie.

Mother Clotilda Weinheimer



Third General Superior



ENGLAND and Ireland had each given the Erie Sisters of St. Joseph a mother superior. The third superior, also Europe-cradled, came from the mainland—from Germany.

Born in Bavaria, Germany, in 1848, the daughter of Sebastian and Barbara Weinheimer, she was baptized Wilhelmina. Because her parents were well-to-do, we may assume a good education for her in the best schools of her day or perhaps under private tutors. Solid religious instruction and the example of good Christian parents are axiomatic to yield the fruit of three vocations to the Erie community of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Migrating to America in the late 1850's, the Weinheimer family settled in Syracuse, New York, where Wilhelmina's father conducted a prosperous dry goods business. Two daughters, Catherine and Regina, entered the community in 1866, receiving the names Sisters Anastasia and Ignatia, respectively, as the sixth and seventh members of the community.

Four years later in St. Patrick Church, Erie, Wilhelmina's parents saw their third daughter invested as a Sister of St. Joseph and called, in religion, Sister Clotilda. During her novitiate, she devoted her time and energy to the care of the increasing number of Civil War orphans.

On August 14, 1872, Sister Clotilda made her religious profession. The year before, she had been warmly welcomed on the staff of St. Joseph School where she had taught the children of German emigrants in South Erie. In 1875, Sister Clotilda was assigned residence and duties at St. Vincent Hospital; in 1880, she was appointed assistant superior; and, in the general election of 1883, she succeeded Mother Ambrosia as general superior.

To the average person, a term of three years seems a short period of time, but during her three years as general superior,



*St. Mary Home for the Aged
Erie, 1930*

Mother Clotilda completed many an endeavor that in those days demanded as much faith and courage as the building and manning of a space missile does today.

In September, 1883, Mother Clotilda opened St. John School, assigning Sister Coletta Knapp principal. The following year, when she opened St. Mary Old Folk's Home, she brought to fruition a dream long cherished by the community. This was but one example

of the first superiors' zeal to complement the endeavors of their predecessors. Mother Agnes had first envisioned this home fondly called today by Archbishop Gannon "The Gate of Heaven." Mother Ambrosia Power had purchased the property. Mother Clotilda brought the aspirations of these superiors to realization. In December, 1885, Mother Clotilda opened St. Michael School, Erie, with Sister Tobia Blenner as superior.

When, in August, 1886, her term of office as general superior ended, Mother Clotilda was happy to lay aside the burdens of authority and spend the remaining years of her life in the obedient service of the community. After various assignments for both long and short terms, some administrative, she died January 5, 1925.

The constitutions of her Institute were always the mirror wherein Mother Clotilda considered herself and wherein we consider her now as we "give thanks to the Lord, the Giver of all good" for her contribution to her community and to the diocese which she served so faithfully.

Mother Eugenia Quirk



Fourth General Superior



BRIGHT August morning of 1886 brought to the superiorship of the twenty-six-year-old Erie community of the Sisters of St. Joseph an instrument of Providence. The occasion was the triennial election of a general superior; the place, the chapel at the motherhouse on East Third Street; and Sister Eugenia, late arrived from her duties at St. Vincent Hospital, came dressed in her oldest habit. Little did she realize God's designs on her as she knelt among the thirty-five professed sisters of the community waiting for Bishop Mullen to proceed with the election. She was at peace in her anonymity; but God had need of her, and the manifestation of His will was to come through this bishop who had watched her progress since the August day, some twelve years earlier, when he had invested her in the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph.



*Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes
Villa Maria Campus*



*Villa Maria Motherhouse and Academy
Erie, 1892*

Bishop Mullen was close to the small community. He had realized, when superiors appointed Sister Eugenia mistress of novices just seven months after her profession, that hers was a spiritual progress that was more than ordinary. Three years as novice mis-

tress and six years as superior of St. Vincent Hospital had confirmed the wisdom of their choice.

Prayer was Sister Eugenia's answer to every problem; prayer would be the keynote of her life through the thirty-one years that followed her appointment to office by Bishop Mullen, years during which she was triennially elected general superior.

If the cradle of spirituality and sanctity is an exemplary Christian home, it was here that Mary Quirk learned from her parents, Sarah and Thomas, a deep love and compassion for God's poor and afflicted. She was born December 17, 1857, at New Rochelle, New York, and later moved with her family to Dunkirk, New York. The unmistakable signs of a religious vocation that had been manifest early in her life came to fruition

under the spiritual direction of the Passionist Fathers. Through them Providence led her to the Erie community of Sisters of St. Joseph where she was received, March 19, 1874, by Bishop Mullen at the recommendation of Mother Agnes Spencer.

The record of the years of spiritual growth can never be written; it remains for eternity alone to reveal, that God may be glorified. Mother Eugenia was first a woman of prayer; then, all things to all men. To God she entrusted the problems of her community as it felt the pressures of poverty — the weightier the problems, the more nearly boundless her faith.

The motherhouse on East Third Street was also the orphanage; and the orphans were the riches of Mother's poverty. During the diphtheria epidemic of 1892, little Jimmy Donlin was pronounced critically ill. In the hours preceding his going to God, Mother Eugenia did all that her motherliness could suggest to lessen his suffering, just as his own mother might have done. But the tiny life was not to be spared, nor was Mother Eugenia to be spared the throes of the illness. The prayers of the children were again beseeching heaven—this time for the recov-

ery of their "Mother." And God was pleased to answer.

On all sides Mother Eugenia was faced with the necessity of expanding the facilities of the congregation. August, 1890, saw the orphanage so overcrowded that some of the children had to be taken to St. Mary Home on Twenty-sixth and Ash Streets. In Meadville, work was begun on a new addition to Spencer Hospital. Construction of a new chapel for St. Mary Home also had started. These were anxieties enough to try a woman of lesser faith, but Mother Eugenia faced them with characteristic trust. God would provide, and He did. The host of benefactors—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—have remained anonymous to the general public; but to the Sisters of St. Joseph they represent a cherished memory, a glorious tradition.

Diocesan history names the Very Reverend Thomas Aloysius Casey as an outstanding priest, rector first at St. Patrick Pro Cathedral, later of St. Peter Cathedral, and finally vicar-general of the Diocese of Erie. In the hearts of the Sisters of St. Joseph, he was their greatest benefactor. Father Casey donated the grounds of Villa Maria, planned the structure and supervised its erection. Villa Maria Academy, dedicated May 28, 1892, stands a memorial to his zeal and liberality.

Soon after Villa Maria Academy opened, there were numerous requests for the sisters to staff new parish schools. St. Lawrence School in Houtzdale had been opened September 1, 1886, shortly after Mother Eugenia took office. On August 28, 1893, two new missions were opened: St. Leo in Ridgway, Pennsylvania; and St. Francis in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. The Erie parochial school system expanded likewise: St. Ann School opened in September, 1896; Sacred Heart School, in January, 1897; and St. Peter, in September of the same year. The last school to be staffed during Mother Eugenia's term of office was St. Mary at Reynoldsville, opened September, 1901. In May, 1911, at the request of Bishop Fitzmaurice, Mother Eugenia accepted the management of Harborcreek Training School, founded at this time by Monsignor H. C. Wienker.

By 1897 the expansion of facilities again became so imperative that, on August 15 of that year, Villa Maria was named Novitiate and Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph. When Mother Eugenia took up her residence

*St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum,
Erie, 1872*





St. Joseph's Home for Children, Erie, 1924

at the new motherhouse, she appointed Sister Eulalia Hernon to succeed her as superior of St. Joseph Orphanage.

In 1902 when Mother Eugenia celebrated her Silver Jubilee, plans for an addition to Villa Maria were already being formulated. With faith more abundant than funds, the building was begun and, in June, 1904, was

dedicated. The debt on the building was to remain perhaps the heaviest cross of Mother Eugenia's administration. Pray and work as she might, she was not to have the satisfaction of seeing it liquidated. God had granted her a rich harvest of blessings, but this one was not to be realized during her lifetime.

Growth and progress had, indeed, key-noted Mother Eugenia's era. The years had been as fruitful as her life had been unostentatious. Quietly, prayerfully she had sent the roots of the community ever deeper that the harvest of future years might be greater. Mother Eugenia had been fired by an intense love of God, and the spark of that love had enkindled a flame that would burn through the years after her passing. She left to her community a rich heritage — the warmth of her motherliness, the strength of her spirituality.

Mother Helena Dillon



Fifth General Superior



WHEN Mother Eugenia died before the expiration of her term of office in December, 1917, Bishop Fitzmaurice appointed Sister Helena Dillon, then mistress of novices, to succeed her. So compatible was this choice with the wishes of the sisters that Mother Helena was to be elected triennially to the office of general superior until the time of her death twenty-five years later.

By unique coincidence, it was in 1860, about the time the pioneer Sisters of St. Joseph in the Erie diocese were settling in Corsica, that Rebecca Dillon was born to Thomas and Katherine Dillon in Olean, New York. God has His way of making all things fit into His plan. This time He saw to it that while yet a child, Rebecca moved with her family to Corry, Pennsylvania. Here she attended the Select School conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the sisters she was one day destined to guide.

There is reason to believe that Rebecca's first interviews relative to entering were with Mother Agnes Spencer. But her life as a sister began when Mother Ambrosia Power received the eighteen-year-old Rebecca Dillon as a postulant. At reception, August 25, 1878, she received the name Sister Mary Helena; two years later, December 31, 1880, she made her final profession.

For twelve years, mission life became a concrete experience for Sister Helena. Her first appointments in the teaching profession sent her to St. Brigid School, Meadville, and to St. Bernard School, Bradford. But her forty-nine years of residence at Villa Maria began in the spring of 1892, when the new building was ready for occupancy. In the following September, Sister Helena graced the first faculty of Villa Maria Academy; a year later, she became its directress.

As directress, Sister Helena, with her prodigious understanding of youth, her queenly bearing and noble character, her intellectual attainments and her astute managerial capabilities, fashioned a private school whose standards and achievements in general education, music and culture were unsurpassed



*Villa Maria College, Gannon Hall
Erie, 1927*



by any school of its type in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

In 1916, Mother Eugenia appointed Sister Helena mistress of novices. In that office, Sister Helena had one brief year of experience in the direction of souls as a preparation for her appointment as the spiritual mother of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Mother Helena's first year as general superior moved along smoothly; Bishop Fitzmaurice had reason to be well pleased with his choice. Meanwhile the Bishop himself was beginning to find the heavy duties of his office taxing beyond his strength. In February of 1918, therefore, an Auxiliary Bishop was consecrated: Bishop John Mark Gannon, who was one day to become Mother Helena's esteemed adviser.

In the same year, 1918, influenza surged through the city of Erie, closing schools and filling hospitals. To Mother Helena's request that her sisters be permitted to volunteer as nurses, the Bishop gave ready acquiescence. Among the many sisters who heroically worked throughout the epidemic, several contracted the disease. Of these, two sacrificed their lives: Sister Gerard McCarthy and

A Century of Service

Sister Anastasia Kebort. While she mourned the loss of these unselfish sisters, Mother Helena rejoiced in offering to the Trinity the first fruits of her community's readiness to give even their lives for the love and service of their neighbor.

On June 11, 1920, the congregation lost its spiritual father: Bishop Fitzmaurice. While the sisters prayed for the repose of his soul, they asked, too, that God would send them just such another bishop. The answer to their prayers exceeded their fondest expectation. Before the year had expired, December 16, 1920, Bishop John Mark Gannon was installed Bishop of Erie.

Bishop Gannon and the Sisters of St. Joseph were friends of long-standing, united by bonds of educational and spiritual interests. Through the succeeding years, Mother Helena worked hand in hand with His Excellency in the development and establishment of community institutions, which will remain as monuments to their boundless zeal for the glory of God.

Early in her administration, Mother Helena saw the need for expansion and edu-

*Maryvale Preschool
Erie, 1938*



cational opportunity. Encouraged by the whole-hearted approval of Bishop Gannon, she began to lay plans for a new chapel and a college building to be constructed on Villa Maria campus. On July 2, 1925, ground was broken for Our Lady's Chapel and Gannon Hall, the latter being named for the community's beloved superior. In September, 1925, the first college classes were held. In the same year the college received its charter, an achievement due in a large measure to the tireless efforts of its president, Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph J. Wehrle, S.T.D.

At the time of its dedication in 1927, Our Lady's Chapel, with its French Gothic arches in polychrome and its jeweled type windows,

was acclaimed as a work of superior art. The exquisite main altar, made up of bot-ticino marble, tapestries, and ornamental iron riddle posts, was specially designed for the chapel and was presented to the Villa by the Most Reverend Bishop in memory of his parents.

Besides the opening of Villa Maria College and the construction of its buildings, more works were undertaken during Mother Helena's term of office. At the invitation of Bishop Gannon, the sisters assumed management of the Erie Day Nursery, and took charge of the following parochial schools: Holy Rosary, St. Andrew, Blessed Sacrament—all in Erie; and St. Gregory School in North East. Additions, also, were made to community institutions: one large addition to Spencer Hospital in Meadville, two additions to St. Mary Home for the Aged in Erie, and a nurses' home and a maternity home at St. Vincent Hospital in Erie.

As the 1930's advanced, both Villa Maria Academy and Villa Maria College taxed their physical capacities. To provide room for further expansion, Mother Helena purchased the former Westcott home on West Lake Road. Bishop Gannon blessed the edifice on December 13, 1938, and named it Maryvale in honor of Our Lady and in honor of the community's benefactor, Mrs. Mary Bateman, the sister of Mother Helena.

Lists of buildings erected, of projects supervised, give only a faint sketch of Mother Helena's constant thought for her community and the Diocese of Erie. At the time of her death, June 19, 1942, the community was in the midst of a period of verdant growth, of far-reaching expansion. Mother Helena had nurtured the tender shoots of its work—the teaching, the nursing, the care of the poor, the aged, the orphaned. Under her supervision, each of those works had achieved fruitful maturity, had reached a new status in the eyes of civil and ecclesiastical authorities alike.

In the concluding sentence of his sermon at her funeral, Bishop John Mark Gannon summarized his feelings and those of Mother Helena's bereaved community: "We have to stand up now in all our courage and pick up where she left off . . . go on, always keeping in our hearts and on our lips a prayer that God might give a great reward to Mother Helena, one of the most perfect daughters of St. Joseph I have ever known."



Mother Aurelia A'Hearn



Sixth General Superior



IN the early spring of 1942, the Silver Jubilee year of her superiorship, Mother Helena petitioned the Most Reverend Bishop Gannon to set a date for the election of one to succeed her. Relieved of the heavy burdens of her office, she longed to spend whatever time remained, in guiding the community's destiny by her devoted prayers. Just five days before the feast of St. John Baptist, the date set for the election, the heavens opened to receive a saintly spouse and superior while the loyal community stood wrapped in deepest sorrow.

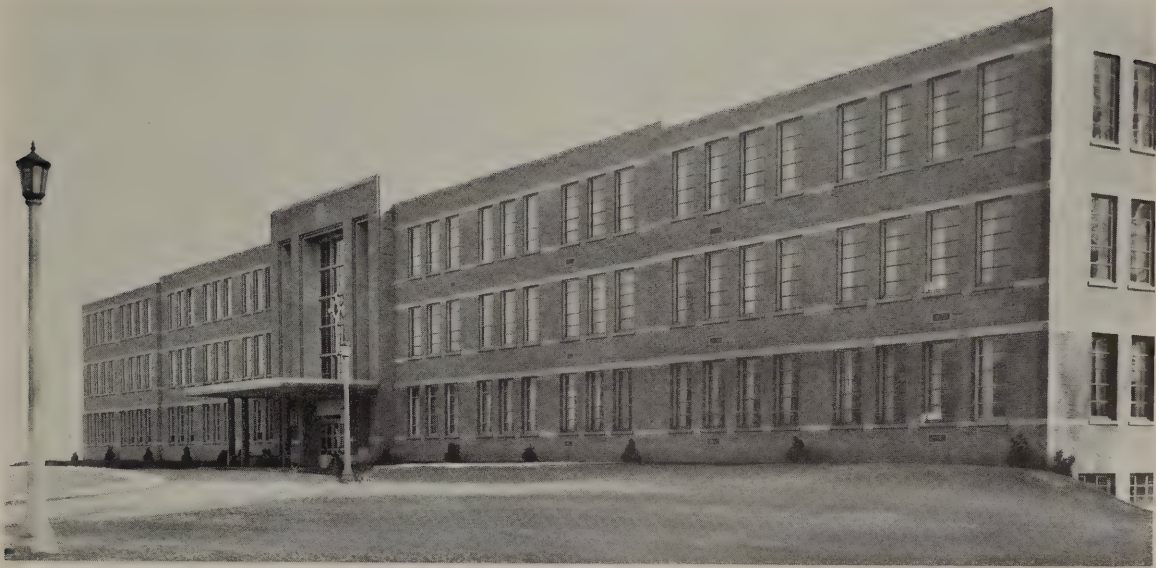
On the morning of June 24, holy Mass began at the hour of Matins in Our Lady's Chapel. It was a Mass that found the hearts of the Sisters of St. Joseph beating faster than usual, for they were imploring the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the selection of a new superior.

In her pew in mid-chapel, Sister Aurelia, the novice mistress, turned her missal to the Introit of the Mass of the day and read: "The Lord has called me by name. Under cover of His hand He has protected me and has made me as His chosen arrow."

Sister Aurelia little thought that before the sun would set, God—in the person of the Bishop—would call her by name and would ask her to step forward, kneel before the Tabernacle, and accept the decision of the sisters because God has made her "as His chosen arrow."

From the strength of her own mother's example, the ideal of cheerful acceptance of God's will had come to her as naturally as had life. Mother Aurelia was born Kathleen A'Hearn — daughter of Ella and Thomas A'Hearn—in Lyons, Colorado. Shortly after Mrs. A'Hearn was widowed, she moved the family east to Greenville, Pennsylvania. There in the wholesome atmosphere of a happy home, the future Mother Aurelia grew up. While not strangers to the family, trials were always secondary to an abiding faith and loving ties.

God had blessed the future superior with



*Villa Maria Academy
West Lake Road, Erie, 1953*

*Harborcreek Training School For Boys,
Erie, 1911*



a rich endowment of natural gifts; He would exact much. Providence had led her across the country, now He would lead her across the diocese to the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, where she entered February 14, 1923. Bishop Gannon presided at the investiture of the new Sister Aurelia in August of the same year, as he would preside nineteen years later when Mother Aurelia became the sixth general superior in the community's eighty-two-year history.

Sister Aurelia had spent eighteen years in the apostolate of the classroom: first, at St. Leo School, Ridgway; then, as head of the Latin department at Villa Maria Academy. Two years after her final profession, the will of God brought her an appointment as novice mistress. To each responsibility she brought the same geniality, the same quiet dignity; to each, God brought the plenitude of His grace, the abundance of His blessings. These eighteen years of cooperation with God's grace constituted her "hidden life" — a period during which God was preparing her to assume the task, as His instrument, of guiding the community through the period of its greatest progress.



*Archbishop Gannon visits
St. Joseph's Home for Children*

Early in her administration, Mother Aurelia was faced with the need of a more ambitious building program that would help sustain the advance of a fast-growing diocese. From kindergarten to college, expansion was the key word. Maryvale Preschool took over the Briggs Home. Within a six-year period, the purchase of another forty-two acres adjacent to Maryvale provided a most desirable site for a future educational center for the community. There in September, 1953, Villa Maria Academy was dedicated. The centenary year will witness ground-breaking for the first three buildings of the new Villa Maria College at this same site.

Mother Aurelia has answered the Archbishop's call for teaching sisters and catechetical supervisors in new schools and centers: St. Paul School, St. Mark the Evangelist, Our Lady of Peace School, Our Lady's Christian School—all in Erie; the Diocesan Catechetical Institute at Houtzdale, Pennsylvania, and the Mercer County Catechetical Center at Mercer, Pennsylvania. Four sisters now complement the staff of Catholic Charities with agency offices in St. Joseph Home.

The decade 1949-1959 also yielded a new nurses' home and hospital wing at Spencer Hospital, Meadville; a new nurses' home and a three-million-dollar addition at St. Vincent Hospital; a new St. Mary Geriatric Hospital in Erie. This last project, undertaken and completed at the suggestion of Archbishop Gannon, was hailed as a climax to his social welfare planning and leadership. The Sisters of St. Joseph were pleased to be entrusted, not only with the realization of another of the Archbishop's dreams, but also with the hospital care of old people of all faiths.

*St. Mary Geriatric Hospital
Erie, 1957*





Villa Madonna
Columbus, Ohio, 1956

Proof that the community has reached another milestone of maturity is the establishment of a foundation outside the diocese, at the request of the late Bishop Michael J. Ready of the See of Columbus, Ohio. Erie Sisters of St. Joseph are at present staffing Villa Madonna Convent, Columbus, but will be withdrawn when its own members, now in training at Villa Maria Novitiate and Juniorate, Erie, attain autonomy.

The roots of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Erie have been planted, nurtured, strengthened. With the Columbus foundation, they show promise of a new harvest.

Such is the story of their humble beginnings, of their struggles and their devoted achievements; the story of the spiritual mothers who have led seven hundred Sisters of St. Joseph toward sainthood and toward the Spouse whom they have faithfully served in works of zeal and charity throughout the diocese. Through the leadership of these instruments of Providence, God has blessed the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Erie for one hundred years. Praised be His holy name.





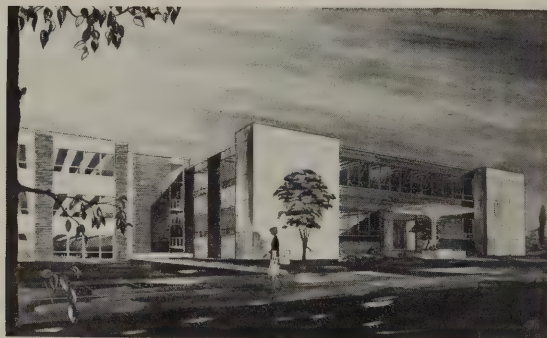
*Archbishop Gannon,
Master Builder*

A Century of Service

Under the leadership of their beloved Archbishop, the Sisters of Saint Joseph look forward to further growth and expansion in higher education.



*Villa Maria College Administration Building
West Lake Road, Erie.
Proposed plan*



*Villa Maria College Dining Hall
West Lake Road, Erie. Proposed plan.*



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